May still fighting for climate; Green leader says she'll continue to press other parties for action

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Body

Don't expect Elizabeth May to fade from view.

May, whose 13 years as leader of the Green Party of Canada defined the party and became its public face to Canadians, surprised political observers Monday with the announcement that she had relinquished the post.

However, she will remain the party's leader in Parliament for now, staying in the spotlight as she continues to press other political parties for more aggressive action on climate change, saying the "crisis is as critical as ever."

"I'm not going away as part of a political force or a political movement in this country to get real climate action," she said.

"None of the other parties - lamentably, not one of them - understands the urgency and is prepared to do what needs to be done."

On Twitter, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau paid tribute to May's long record of policy work on environmental issues.

"@ElizabethMay, you've been a champion for the environment for decades, and your leadership on the climate crisis has helped push our country forward. I know you'll continue to inspire Canadians of all ages & political stripes to fight for a better & cleaner future," Trudeau wrote.

May, 65, became leader of the Green party in 2006 and her tenure makes her the longest-serving of the current federal party leaders, as well as the only woman. She first won her seat in the B.C. riding of Saanich-Gulf Islands in 2011, when she beat Conservative incumbent Gary Lunn.

May had previously signalled her decision to step down as leader was coming. Monday, as May introduced Green MPs Paul Manly (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) and Jenica Atwin (Fredericton), who won their seats in the Oct. 21 election in the party's best showing ever, she made the announcement.

She said she was making good on a promise she made to her daughter, Cate, that the 2019 election would be her last. "I absolutely swore to her, 'Last time, I promise,' " May said.

But the Green leader said she wanted to go out at a time when the party had momentum and growth, and said the recent election provided that moment.

She turned aside questions whether the results fell short of expectations for the Green party, noting that it produced a best-ever showing in number of votes - more than one million - and seats, at three.

May said she made her decision in the best interests of the party, mindful in a minority, an election could come at any time. The new leader will be chosen next October in Charlottetown. Jo-Ann Roberts, the party's deputy leader, will serve as interim leader.

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